

# The Scots-Irish in North Carolina

North Carolina is home to many citizens of Scots-Irish descent. Scottish and Irish cultural influences surround us today. But what brought the Scots-Irish people to North Carolina?

The Scots-Irish journey took place over many years, but it began in the Scottish lowlands. During the early 17th century, James I, king of England and Scotland, encouraged English and Scottish Protestants to settle land in Northern Ireland. The property they settled on had been taken away from Irish Catholics. Many lowland Scots migrated to the province of Ulster in Northern Ireland. There the Scottish settlers—called Ulster Scots or Scots-Irish—lived within defensive strongholds meant to keep out the Irish, who they feared would try to reclaim their lands.

By the 18th century, the appeal of life in Ulster had diminished. The Ulster Scots disliked the way the English discriminated against them. England enacted laws against Irish Catholics and Scottish Presbyterians because they were not members of the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church was the official Church of England. Ulster Scots were not allowed to participate in government. They were also made to pay tithes to the Anglican Church, even though they were not members.

As the population in Ulster grew, land became scarcer and English landlords charged higher land rent. This, combined with low wages and several crop failures, encouraged the Ulster Scots to look for a new home.

Many Ulster Scots decided to leave Ireland for America. Since America was part of the British Empire, the language was the same. There were no restrictions on emigration. In Ireland Ulster Scots were part of the linen trade between Ulster and Philadelphia. Trading ships frequently traveled between Ireland and America. Ulster Scots could purchase passage aboard one of these trading vessels. Sometimes entire church congregations left together. Those individuals who could not afford to pay their fare sometimes arranged to become indentured servants for people in America. Indentured servants generally worked for seven years in exchange for the cost of their passage to America. Some Ulster Scots who had no money to pay for their passage and no prior arrangements to work for someone, had to wait on the ship after it docked until the ship's captain could sell their labor in order to collect his payment for their trip.

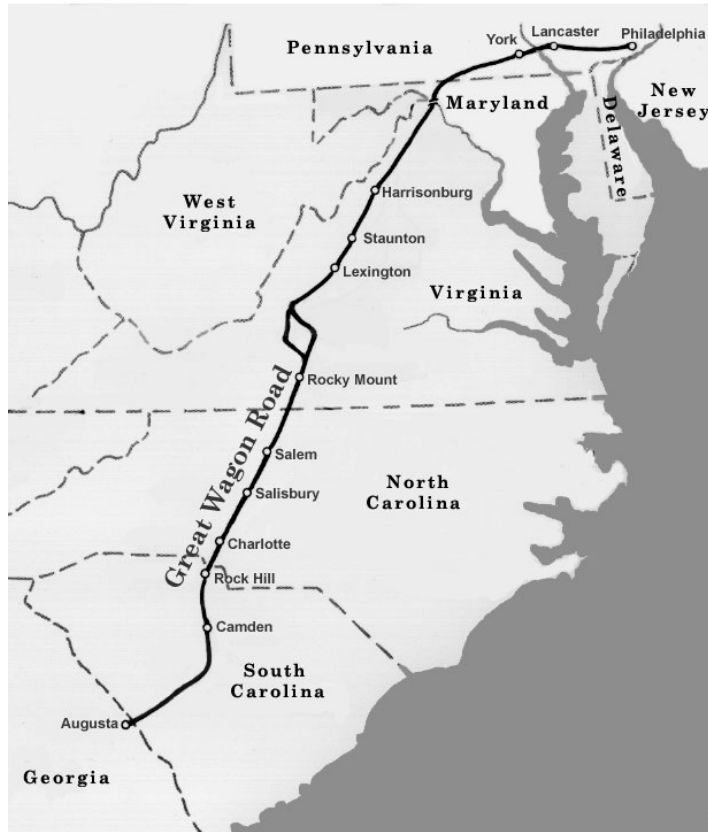
Passengers could bring few belongings with them to America. The sea voyage could take anywhere from five weeks to two months. The trip was hazardous. Ship owners were eager to pack as many paying passengers on board as possible. This overcrowding led to the spread of diseases and food and water shortages. Storms also presented significant dangers for travelers. Children under seven rarely survived the voyage, and up to 15

percent of adults faced a similar fate. But for those who risked the passage, wonderful new opportunities awaited.

Many Scots-Irish immigrants settled in Philadelphia or other parts of Pennsylvania for a time. Most continued farming as they had in Ulster. Eventually land in Pennsylvania became scarce. This was partially due to the numerous immigrants coming from all over Europe, and partially because of Scots-Irish farming methods. Scots-Irish farmers often depleted their land of all of its resources and then moved on to another piece of land.

Numerous Scots-Irish moved to Virginia in search of more land. Others continued migrating southward through Virginia's Shenandoah

Valley along the Great Wagon Road into the North Carolina Piedmont, where land was even cheaper. As they depleted land in the Piedmont, some Scots-Irish moved westward across the state into the North Carolina Mountains. Their descendents, and traces of Scots-Irish heritage, remain in North Carolina today. We can witness the influence of the Scots-Irish in Presbyterian churches, religious practices, music, food, log cabin styles they borrowed from other immigrant groups, and the fierce independence of their North Carolina descendents.



*Great Wagon Road*